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STATEMENT OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTEE ON UNICEF TO THE 1991 UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD

1. We are grateful for the privilege accorded to us to address this important gathering of those dedicated to the well-being of the children of the world.

2. We pay special tribute to the visionary leadership of this Executive Board and to the staff of UNICEF for the key roles they played in bringing to fruition the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November 1989 and the World Summit for Children in September 1990. We are aware of the tireless efforts that were devoted to making these two events a reality. The Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) Committee is furthermore indebted to UNICEF for its strong insistence that NGOs be present at the Summit. This constituted the first time that NGOs were allowed to play a role in a summit meeting. The NGO Committee has given its wholehearted support to these initiatives, recognizing that, together, they provide the world's family of nations with a set of moral and legal standards by which to measure the just treatment of children everywhere.

3. It is our strong conviction that these two events are inseparable, irrevocable and transformational. At some distant time in the future, humankind will look back in history to these two events as the moment when the world began to recognize appropriately the significance of the child and of childhood as key factors in the progress and development of the human race.

4. NGOs have been assessing the significance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relevance of the World Summit for Children to their work. That reflection has led most of us to feel that we cannot go on conducting business as we have for so many years. We are now presented with a new opportunity to spread the emphasis of what we do more evenly across the

three traditional aims of our mission - survival, protection and development. Within this new context, we are attempting to discern how we can be most helpful, in cooperation with UNICEF and with national Governments, in meeting the goals of the Summit Plan of Action. Just as nations are developing their own plans of action, many NGOs are also developing new plans of action to govern their commitment of resources over the coming years. In that sense, the World Summit for Children has become a magnet around which all else is now organized.

5. A third event that has influenced our work was the World Conference on Education for All, which represented a new expression of cooperation between four United Nations agencies. It also represented a new expression of cooperation among those agencies and the NGOs involved in the education sector. The close cooperation the Conference encouraged has been maintained by the creation of an inter-agency/inter-NGO network to facilitate and promote the Conference follow-up. The success of this model would suggest that United Nations agencies should consider developing a coordinated strategy for supporting NGO networks by themes, and not simply in relation to their allegiance to individual organizations.

6. As a result of all these events, there are several areas where increased cooperation and change are taking place. These may be noted in some of the newly emerging expressions of our activities. I would like to call your attention to the following:

(a) Special meetings of the chief executive officers of NGO member organizations have been held in New York and Geneva this past year so as to encourage their participation, in addition to that of their institutional representatives to the NGO Committee on UNICEF. This increased dialogue between NGOs and UNICEF at the decision-making level has strengthened the sense of common purpose, especially as efforts are made to ensure that the promises of the World Summit for Children are fulfilled;

(b) Programme staff from NGOs active in the field of nutrition met in an all-day consultation with UNICEF nutrition staff in New York to discuss UNICEF strategies for the 1990s and ways of reaching the Summit goal to reduce severe and moderate child malnutrition by 50 per cent by the year 2000. In addition, NGOs and other experts active in the area of breast-feeding have formed a new World Alliance for Breast-feeding Action in order to increase their effectiveness on this issue. The framework for their action will be the Summit goals and the Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breast-feeding;

(c) Ways in which NGOs can best respond to the challenge of the Summit will be on the agenda of the seventh annual forum of the NGO Committee, which will be held from 4 to 8 November 1991 at Harare. The theme will be "effective participation in local and global child development". An additional underlying goal is to promote a North/South and South/South partnership among NGOs in responding to the particularly difficult situation of many sub-Saharan African countries;

(d) Also as part of post-Summit mobilization efforts, the NGO newsletter, "Action for Children", will be integrated with two UNICEF publications to create the new publication "First Call", which will appear bimonthly. An increased amount of information will thus be disseminated more rapidly to a wide audience, including a new level of decision makers. This merger also places the NGO Committee in a more holistic perspective within the total work of UNICEF;

(e) The NGO Coordinating Group on Central and Eastern Europe, based at Geneva, has met four times, while a subsidiary body in New York has met once. This body is attempting to provide a more integrated and coordinated approach by NGOs, in consultation with UNICEF, to the region than has been attempted in the past;

(f) The NGO Committee, which has for some years been interested in children in especially difficult circumstances, has expanded the focus of that interest to give more concern not to just the physical, but also to the psychological needs of children. A recent seminar on children of war, entitled "Adult Response to Children in Time of War: Intervention, Theory, Practices and Techniques" and organized by two working groups of the NGO Committee on UNICEF, underlined that perspective;

(g) The NGO Committee has placed an emphasis on the girl child to complement the emerging interest of UNICEF. Special meetings are being planned to share information between NGOs and UNICEF and to develop strategies to overcome the obstacles to girls' access to education;

(h) The NGO Committee on UNICEF has secured a place on the International Facilitating Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development so as to ensure that environmental repercussions on children are brought into the overall deliberations and preparations for the Conference and to bring environmental concerns to the agendas of child-focused NGOs;

(i) An NGO Committee representative has been designated to work with the United Nations Commission on Social Development, which has been charged with the responsibility for the International Year of the Family;

(j) In the course of this year, several new member organizations have been added to the NGO Committee. These new members have made a significant contribution to the total work of the Committee by bringing new perspectives to other members.

7. This listing is not meant to be a recital of accomplishments. Rather, it is an expression of the commitment of NGOs to strive to be more inclusive, more integrated, more intentional and more focused on grass-roots issues in all that they do.

8. The NGO Committee on UNICEF sees the future as one of unique opportunity for significant gains to be made in the area of child development. At the start of this decade, when more children will be added to the world's

population than at any other time in human history, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration and Plan of Action from the World Summit for Children provide us with the aims to make significant progress in improving the quality of life available to all children.

9. We welcome and look forward to more opportunities for dialogue with the Executive Board of UNICEF and hope to strengthen the partnership which has grown over the years.